



Denmark

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Evangelical Lutheran Church is the state church and enjoys some privileges not available to other faiths.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of 16,639 square miles, and its population is approximately 5.4 million. As of January 2005, 83.2 percent of the population belonged to the official Evangelical Lutheran Church. Although only approximately 3 percent of church members attend services regularly, most members utilize the church for weddings, funerals, baptisms, confirmations, and religious holidays.

The second largest religious community is Muslim, constituting approximately 3.5 percent of the population (180,000 persons), followed by communities of Catholics (35,000), Jehovah's Witnesses (15,000), Jews (7,000), Baptists (5,500), Pentecostals (5,000), and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) (4,500). There are also many communities with fewer than 3,000 members, including Seventh-day Adventists, the Catholic Apostolic Church, the Salvation Army, Methodists, Anglicans, and Russian Orthodox. The German minority in southern Jutland and other non-Danish communities (particularly Scandinavian groups) have their own religious groups. Approximately 5.4 percent of the population is not religious, and an estimated 1.5 percent is atheist.

Missionaries operate within the country, including representatives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and Jehovah's Witnesses. The European headquarters of the Church of Scientology is located in Copenhagen, although it is not officially recognized as a religion. In 2003, the indigenous belief system known as Forn Sidr, which worships the old Norse gods, was recognized officially as a religion.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Constitution stipulates that the Evangelical Lutheran Church is the national church, the reigning monarch shall be a member of the church, and the state shall support it. The Evangelical Lutheran Church is the only religious organization that can receive state subsidies or funds directly through the tax system. Approximately 12 percent of the Church's revenue comes from state subsidies; most of the rest comes from the church tax that is paid only by members. No individual may be compelled to pay church tax or provide direct financial support to the national church or any other religious organization. Members of other faiths, notably Catholics, have argued that the system is unfair, and that the Government does not provide religious equality, despite providing religious freedom. Allowing other religious organizations to be given the same status and privileges as the Evangelical Lutheran Church would require changes to the Constitution.

Eleven Christian holy days are considered national holidays: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, Easter Monday, Common Prayer Day, Ascension, Pentecost, Whit Monday, Christmas Eve, Christmas, and Christmas Day 2 (December 26). The holidays do not have a negative impact on any religious groups.

Aside from the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Government gives official status to religions in two ways: it recognizes religions by royal decree, and it approves religions under the 1969 Marriage Act. As of April 2005, 12 religious organizations were recognized by royal decree, including the Roman Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, and Russian Orthodox churches as well as Judaism; and 91 were approved, including several Islamic groups, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Seventh-day Adventists, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christian Orthodox, Hindu, Baha'is, and Hara Krishnas. By approving religions under the 1969 Marriage Act, the Government allows individually named priests to conduct officially recognized marriage ceremonies, and thereby legally approves the religion.

Both recognized and approved religions enjoy certain tax exemptions. Other religious communities are entitled to practice their faith without any sort of licensing, but their marriage ceremonies are not recognized by the state and they are not granted tax-exempt status.

1999 Guidelines for approval of religious organizations established the following requirements for religious groups: a written text of the religion's central traditions, descriptions of its most important rituals, an organizational structure accessible to public control and approval, and constitutionally elected representatives who may be held responsible by the authorities. Additionally, the organization must "not teach or perform actions inconsistent with public morality or order." Scientologists did not seek official approval as a religious organization during the period covered by this report. Their first application for approval was made in the early 1970's and rejected; the second and third applications were made in 1976 and 1982, and both were denied. In mid-1997, the Scientologists filed a fourth application, which was suspended at their request in 2000. In suspending their application, the Scientologists asked the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs to clarify the approval procedure; however, the Ministry told them they must first submit an application before the Ministry can provide any feedback. Despite the Scientologists' unofficial status, the church maintains its European headquarters in Copenhagen.

There are no restrictions on proselytizing or missionary work as long as practitioners obey the law and do not act inconsistently with public morality or order. All schools, including religious schools, receive government financial support. While the Evangelical Lutheran faith is taught in the public schools, a student may withdraw from religious classes with parental consent. Section 76 of the Constitution protects the rights of parents to home school or educate their children in private schools.

During the period covered by the report, the Government considered legislative and administrative proposals to promote further social integration of refugees and immigrants. The proposals emerged out of widespread political and social attitudes favoring the integration of immigrants and refugees. In June 2004, the Parliament enacted a law directed at foreign religious leaders seeking residence visas. The so called "Imam Law," which is applied by immigration authorities to all foreign religious leaders, requires that the number of religious residence visas be reasonably proportioned to the size of the corresponding religious community. Additionally, the visa applicant must prove association with a recognized or approved religious community and possess a relevant background or education as a religious preacher, missionary or member of a religious community. The Ministry for Refugees, Immigrants, and Integration continued to consider providing resources to establish schools to educate imams, similar to the support the Government provides Christian theological university programs or seminaries. Reaction to the proposal in the Muslim community was mixed. Many young Muslims stated that the imams who come to the country on temporary visas do not speak Danish and cannot answer their questions or address the problems of being a young Muslim in the country. However, the Ministry declined to act on the initiative in the fall of 2004, choosing to wait until the country's divided Muslim community could organize to make its own proposal for publicly funded Islamic education.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

In December 2004, the Dansk Islamisk Begravelsefond (Danish Islamic Cemetery Fund), purchased property in the greater Copenhagen area to use for a Muslim cemetery. The purchase was the culmination of a several-year effort by members of the Muslim community to establish the first Muslim cemetery in the country. The Danish Islamic Cemetery Fund overcame a publicized dispute with municipal authorities over the value of the land which prolonged the purchase efforts. The cemetery is expected to open by 2007.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religious groups in society contributed to religious freedom. The country has a long history of welcoming religious minorities and affording them equal treatment. There are generally amicable relations between religious groups, although the influx of a substantial Muslim population over the last several years resulted in some tension between Muslims and the rest of the population. In September 2004, the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights concluded in a report that the overall political climate for Muslims in the country has deteriorated since 2001.

Minority group unemployment figures, crime rates (especially among young adults), and education drop-out rates tend to be higher, and allegations sometimes are raised of discrimination on the basis of religion. However, it is difficult to separate religious differences from differences in language and ethnicity, and the latter may be equally important in explaining unequal access to well-paying jobs and social advancement. The integration of immigrant groups from Islamic countries is an important political and social topic of discussion. During its national election campaign in February 2005, the coalition center-right Government (successfully reelected to a four-year term) affirmed its commitment to pursuing and promoting effective integration policies intended to address disproportionately high crime rates and unemployment among immigrants from Islamic countries (and other ethnic minorities in the country.)

There were isolated incidents of anti-Semitism, primarily by immigrants. Most involved vandalism, such as graffiti, or nonviolent verbal assaults. There were also isolated incidents of anti-immigrant graffiti and low-level assaults as well as some denial of service and hiring on racial grounds. The Government criticized the incidents, investigated several, and brought some cases to trial.

The international Muslim organization Hizb ut-Tahrir continues to operate in the country despite periodic calls by the various political parties to ban the group. The group has not been cited for any illegal activity since 2002, when the spokesman of the Danish branch of the group was sentenced to 60 days probation for distributing pamphlets calling for the murder of all Jews.

From January through June 2004, there were five incidents of anti-Semitic vandalism, primarily graffiti, and one incident of an anti-Semitic mailing, which the Government condemned and investigated.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. Embassy officers engaged in a Muslim outreach program, which included numerous meetings with religious and community leaders of leading Muslim organizations in the country. Embassy officers had wide-ranging discussions with the Muslim leaders on topics such as religious and cultural diversity, democracy and freedom, and Muslim life in the United States. The Department of State has also sponsored Muslim citizens for International Visitors Programs.

In January 2005, the Embassy participated in targeted Global Anti-Semitism Report outreach by placing an article in the national daily Kristelig Dagblad (circ. 25,000), the country's only religious affairs newspaper. The article stressed the need for governments to take uncompromising steps to address the issue of increased anti-Semitic abuses in Europe and Russia. By reporting numerous instances of abuse targeted at the Jewish community, and by describing the nature of both Muslim-inspired and right-wing hostility to the worldwide Jewish community, the article clearly illustrated the contemporary nature of the problem and caused the newspaper's readership (that includes standard target audiences) to reconsider their position on the issue.

In October 2004, the Embassy welcomed university students from the local organization Humanity in Action to the Embassy for a discussion about their upcoming internships with Congress in Washington. The event continued Embassy's cooperation with Humanity in Action, which is a program for college-aged students designed to introduce them to issues involving human rights and minority issues, and also encourages local students to continue to reflect on the rescue efforts of Jews made by citizens during World War II.

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